

DISCUSSING THE BIG QUESTIONS: USING COLLABORATIVE REASONING IN LITERATURE STUDY

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

Discussing the Big Questions: Using Collaborative Reasoning in Literature Study. (May 2015)

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The motivation behind this research stems from a need for reform in American education. Students who are currently graduating U.S. schools are failing in many basic skills needed for the real world. Today's classrooms are transitioning towards active participation for students, which is beneficial in some aspects, but negligent in others. Educators are calling for group work and inquiry based learning, where the students are encouraged to find the answers for themselves instead of a traditional teacher-led instruction style. This hands-on style learning is very effective theoretically, but when put into practice, students are frequently lost without the proper instructions on how to master a subject without the leadership of the classroom teacher. This study seeks to examine the effectiveness of a particular instructional strategy, Collaborative Reasoning (CR), that allows for student-centered learning in a structured way. CR is a discussion-based model that facilitates the development of argumentative skills and critical thinking. While many studies have been conducted previously on the effect of CR on argumentative skills and text comprehension, there is very little research to determine its ability to be integrated into current curriculum. This study attempts to incorporate collaborative reasoning in other educational frameworks that are already widely accepted and used across the U.S. Specifically, a

venture will be made to blend the literature study framework with that of CR in a way that could be implemented effectively in the current educational practices of a 6th grade classroom.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my incredible parents, Kurt and Kellene Young, who have worked much harder than I to ensure that I could be a part of this university, this program, and this esteemed recognition. Love to you always, and I think we can agree it was all worth it in the end.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The climate of U.S. classrooms has undergone major changes coming into the 21st century (Alexander, 2012). Teachers today are moving away from the traditional recitation style lectures to hands-on, student centered learning. These lessons are proving very advantageous for students who are entering a workforce that is focused on creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration (Kay, 2010). Additionally, teachers across the U.S. are currently battling a lack of time and an excess of content in their curriculums. Now more than ever, educators need to have instructional strategies that are multifaceted; the more skills and information that can be covered effectively the better. Because of this, it is critical that teachers continue to seek out new ways for students to be able to analyze and critique information instead of simply memorizing it. Some of these include argumentation, working with peers, and critical thinking. Previous research has indicated that Collaborative Reasoning can promote argumentative reasoning skills and critical thinking (Reznitskaya et al., 2009), but the extent of its benefits has yet to be fully explored. Another study that has been proven effective in classrooms is that of literature study, a language arts instructional strategy that has students read and discuss an assigned novel (Eeds & Peterson, 1991). The following sections will seek to synthesize these two areas of research, as well as to argue for the integration of these approaches into the classroom.

Argumentation Skills

“Argumentation” is a large umbrella term for any type of reasoning that an individual uses in a social setting. Debating, collaborating, and critiquing are all considered parts of argumentation

(Nussbaum, 2011). Beyond the fact that argumentation has been added to the Common Core Standards, it is an essential skill that students need for developing abilities that are vital for success in today's world. According to Kuhn and Cromwell (2011), "Counterfactual reasoning, dual-perspective reasoning, and integration of opposing arguments are essential building blocks of sophisticated, nuanced real-world argumentative reasoning" (p. 551). Students can develop these skills in a variety of ways. Research by Anderson et al. (2001) has shown that in small group discussions of controversial issues, students can acquire effective argumentative skills from each other without explicit instruction. The phenomenon, which Anderson called the *snowball effect*, is seen when an effective argument stratagem is introduced into a discussion by one student, and other students pick it up to help further develop their own positions without prompting (2001). It is clear that argumentation is a concept that can be taught in a variety of ways, whether formally from a teacher or informally from peers. The question remains, however, of how to create the most effective framework of the discussions for classrooms.

Previous Classroom Success with Literature Study

Literature studies have been used in classrooms for decades. In a typical literature study, or circle, students are placed into small groups and asked to read the same text independently, then come together to discuss and reflect on their reading together as a group. There are many variations to the set up of a literature study, varying mainly because of classroom size, student population, and level of teacher control. The main reason that this instructional framework has been deemed effective resides in its most basic structure, which allows the students to discuss and think critically about something they are reading in class. This opportunity is not frequently provided in many classrooms, and yet can be exponentially beneficial in developing students'

comprehension skills, promoting higher order thinking, and generating quality discussion (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007).

Literature study has been proven to be effective time and time again through rigorous research, and is even evolving to integrate current technologies (Bromley et al, 2014). Additionally, literature study provides students with time to reflect and think metacognitively about their own reading, learning, and interactions with peers, all of which are skills that are continuously necessary throughout school and life (Sanacore, 2013).

Deficits in the Literature Study Framework

Although there are many fortifying components of the literature study framework, there are still some areas that have room for improvement. Historically, when teachers integrate this strategy into their own classrooms, they discover that the “discussion” aspect of the lessons is more difficult than they anticipated. Students who are set loose with a group to discuss their readings are frequently caught off task, uninterested, or, in a worst case scenario, overly ardent to the point of bullying their peers (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007). Research has proven that reading and discussing in groups has many rewarding effects, but without direct instructions for the students on how to conduct themselves during a discussion, the whole process of the literature study can fall short. As explored in the article, “Slow Down, You Move Too Fast: Literature Circles as Reflective Practice”, many tactics to try to promote deep, introspective reflections while discussing with peers are out there, but many are lacking the time and tools to establish the proper standards of discussion that are needed to have successful literature studies in their classrooms (Sanacore, 2011).

Defining Collaborative Reasoning

One way that has been proven to expose students to argumentation is Collaborative Reasoning. CR is grounded in social-cultural theories, rooted in the idea that children develop their thinking, as well as their argumentation skills, through social interactions (Chinn et al, 2001). In this model, students first read a story that presents a dilemma for a character, and then they discuss in a small group what they think the best option is. They do not have to raise their hands, and they are asked to use evidence from the text to support their answers. The students are told explicitly that they do not have to come to a uniform decision, and there is never a “right” answer given (Clark et. al, 2003). Instead, the focus of the discussion is to explore the complexity of the issue from multiple perspectives. In allowing students to discuss and disagree on difficult subjects, they are able to develop those highly desired skills in argumentation, critical thinking, and literacy (Lin et. al, 2012). This tactic of dialogic interactions has proven to be effective in classrooms in multiple studies over the past decade, including when working with English language learners (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001; Clark et. al 2003). Researchers are now looking to see how teachers can implement this strategy into classrooms in a way that integrates other required content such as math, science, social studies, and language arts (Zhang, Anderson, & Nguyen-Jahiel, 2013). By combining the two discussed strategies, this research provides a framework for CR discussions and increases the value of the discussion in a Literature Study.

Blending Collaborative Reasoning and Literature Studies

The two frameworks for this research have many similarities that make them conducive to one another, but also have a few differences. The following section will seek to fully compare the

two frameworks, and explore how they could work together to move towards a blended instructional strategy.

Similarities Between the Two Frameworks

Literature studies, like collaborative reasoning, do not require questioning with right or wrong answers, and instead promote open ended responses (Peterson & Eeds, 1991). Additionally, the teacher in both instructional strategies will serve the same role. Instead of conducting a discussion with the group, the teacher will become a facilitator, only redirecting and interjecting when necessary. Eventually the teacher can become a scaffolded aid in the groups, and be weaned out slowly until the groups can operate self-sufficiently. This is an important factor in both literature studies and CR in that it allows the students to develop skills in argumentation as well as skills interacting with peers and reflecting deeply (Clark et al 2003; Sanacore 2011). Lastly, both of these strategies concentrate on having the discussions focus on the “big picture” questions of the literature they are working with. Asking the students to think, develop arguments, and convey their feelings are the crux of both of the focus frameworks (Peterson & Eeds, 1991; Chinn et al, 2001). Although the major conflicts in the short stories of CR might be more simplistic, it could be argued that the layout of the discussion would lend itself to being applied to a larger, more complex plot line like that of a novel.

Differences Between the Strategies

The differences between literature studies and Collaborative Reasoning are few, but are significant enough to be worth mentioning. The most striking contrast between the two is the type of literature used in each strategy. Collaborative Reasoning is based in the use of short

stories (Clark et al 2003), and literature studies in studying novels (Daniels, 2002). This poses a few concerns for the framework of CR since its productivity with extended story discussions has not yet been researched. However, because the success of developing argumentation skills and increasing comprehension of the story has been proven, length of the story should not be an issue (Villaume et al, 1994). In fact, revisiting the same story frequently as it develops could allow students to improve their discussions as they read. This suggests that whether using short stories or extended novels, students can still gain these benefits, as long as they are engaged in meaningful discussion, no matter the page length. If the readers can treat the stories as a way to discuss and exchange ideas with peers, they will be able to make meaning out of the text (Peterson & Eeds, 1991). Additionally, literature studies have been practiced and used in classrooms of varying age levels from elementary level (Peterson & Eeds, 1991) to adults (Vaille & Williams, 2006), whereas CR has really only been explored in fourth and fifth grade classrooms (Reznitskaya et al, 2009). This poses some problems in the discussion format for older children, but it is safe to assume that if younger age levels can acclimate and benefit from this process, so can older. The question would then lend itself to how to expand the discussions for older age levels to ensure that they are being properly challenged throughout their discussion. These two main points of dispute, what literature to use and how to expand the learning, will be the main focus of this research, along with a plan to implement this hybrid process in a 6th grade classroom.

Research Exploration

Because of these needs in current education, this research study is focused on how the skills learned through collaborative reasoning can be combined with those that are provided in literature study to create a more thorough and effective instructional strategy. To achieve this goal, this study will focus on several novels that are frequently used in literature studies and how

CR can be incorporated into their frameworks. Additionally, materials for assessing student learning and skills will be provided for each novel.

CHAPTER II

INTEGRATING CR WITH LITERATURE STUDY: FRAMEWORK

INTEGRATION

The potential to blend the framework of a literature study with that of collaborative reasoning is exceedingly promising. In fact, the similarities between the two are enough to suggest that the strategies would complement one another in a way that makes both strategies more effective in a classroom than they would be alone. The rest of this chapter will propose an action plan for implementation in a 6th grade classroom.

Determining Small Groups

In a typical literature study, the students are able to choose a novel that they will read in class. This helps to give the students ownership of their work and hopefully help to make them more invested in the process (Daniels, 2002). To prepare them for this, the classroom teacher will often conduct “book talks”, where summaries are presented of each book so that students are able to make an educated list of their top choices. These book talks should take no longer than 2 to 3 minutes for each novel, so as to give the students a preview of what they might expect to read if they were to choose that piece. At a separate time, the teacher will need to go through and place the students into small groups based on the novel they chose, paying close attention to the arrangement of the students who are frequently talkative with those who are typically less outspoken. This will be particularly important in ensuring that each group has someone to spark the conversation, but are still evenly distributed throughout the groups.

Introducing the Process

Because the book talks are so short, time should be allotted to also introduce the process and general outline of the literature study, or “book club”. During this time, the teacher should highlight the general layout of their schedule for the rest of the book club. The timeline for this hybrid process is flexible, depending on what works best for the teacher and school schedule. Many teachers find that taking two or three days out of the week to read and discuss is more conducive to their schedules (Daniels, 2002). Others, who possibly have longer class periods, could spend a blended amount of time between reading/discussing and other content instruction. Additionally, expectations and procedures should also be set on this first day. The book clubs should be able to work in a mostly self-sufficient manner, so explaining the process of where students should store their books, how they should come into class on reading days, what other materials they will need to have when reading, and the noise level and procedures for moving around the room while reading should all be set for the students. Oftentimes, teachers will create anchor charts, or large posters with a bulleted list of this information, for the students to reference until the process becomes second nature.

Practicing CR Style Discussions

Prior to beginning discussions with the novels the students are paired with, a day of teaching the CR discussion format should be taken. By taking this time, the teacher is able to fully introduce the process with the students, which enables them to work through their misunderstandings and kinks as a class before beginning the process with their small groups. Depending on the size of the class, it could be difficult for the teacher to be able to monitor and facilitate every small group discussion. Therefore, taking a day to practice the instructional strategy as a whole class

will allow the teacher to immediately assess which students have mastered the process, which still need monitoring, and be able to pinpoint which aspects of the framework itself each student will require more guidance with. It is important to note that the students will not likely master this process right away; many aspects of CR are quite different than what the students are used to (not having to raise their hands, being able to change their minds on a position), and the transition to this style of discussion can often take some time. With more practice throughout the reading of their novels, students will gain strength in their discussion skills while, ideally, the plots and importance of the story will also be growing in difficulty. In this sense, the quality of the discussions will only improve as the students get deeper into their novels, allowing them to be at the height of discussion abilities as they reach the main climax of the story.

To practice the CR discussion, the classroom teacher must first outline the guidelines and steps that this type of discussion will require. The steps of the discussion should be enumerated as such: read story together and state the major question from the story, and then allow the students to discuss with peers what the main character should do and revisit and change positions as needed. The teacher should explain to the students that they are allowed to speak without raising their hands, but they need to focus on being respectful and courteous to their peers, especially those who have different opinions than they do. Also, they should explicitly state that not only is there no right or wrong answer to the questions that will be asked at the end of the story, but that it is okay to change your mind at any point.

Next, the teacher should give students a short story to be read aloud to the class. It is important that each student has their own copy of the story so that they will be able to reference it during

their discussions and use text evidence to support their positions. There are many short story options available for a teacher to use to introduce the model to the students. Some stories to consider using for this activity or use as a model to guide the teacher's choices are listed, along with a brief summary, in Table 1 below:

Brief Summaries of Ten Stories to use for CR Practice

Story	Big Question	Content
What should Kelly Do? (Weiner, 1980)	Should Kelly tell Evelyn about her painting?	A girl, Kelly, wants to win a painting contest, but her classmate Evelyn is the best painter in the school. On the day to submit their work, Kelly discovers that Evelyn has left her painting outside on the playground and it is beginning to rain.
Ronald Morgan Goes to Bat (Giff, 1990)	Should the coach let Ronald play?	Ronald is a boy who makes frequent mistakes when playing baseball and can neither catch nor hit the ball, but he has great team spirit and really wants to play.
The Trip to the Zoo (Reznitskaya & Clark, 2001)	Are zoos good places for animals?	Two girls discuss whether or not they should join a field trip to a zoo. Lily is excited to see all kinds of animals in the zoo, but Anna thinks that zoos are not good for animals.
Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, 1999)	Should the princess marry the prince?	A princess is going to marry a prince. A dragon comes and burns down their castle and takes away the prince. The princess outwits the dragon and rescues the prince. She has nothing to wear but a paper bag, which is the only thing left after the castle burns. When the prince sees her, he tells her to go away and come back when she dresses herself like a princess.
Marcos' Vote (Nguyen-Jahiel, 1996)	Should Marcos vote for textbooks or computers?	Marcos and Crystal are the two student members of a committee that will make a decision about whether their school should buy a new set of math textbooks or computer software to teach mathematics.
Amy's Goose (Holmes, 1992)	Should Amy let the goose go?	A lonely girl named Amy finds an injured goose. Amy nurses the goose back to health and struggles to decide whether to keep it as a pet in her family's farm or let it fly south with the rest of the flock.
My Name is Different (Prasad, 1987)	Should Chang-Li have changed his name?	A young Chinese American boy changes his name because he is anxious to fit into his new, mostly Anglo school.
The Trail to Willow Valley (Nguyen-Jahiel & Jahiel,	What kind of power plant should Kate recommend?	An environmental scientist, Kate, is asked to give her expert opinion about the type of power a town should build: a coal-burning plant; a biomass plant; a nuclear plant; a wind-farm; a solar plant.

As listed above, each story has a major “big question” identified that the classroom discussion should be focused around. It should be noted that because CR is typically used with younger grade levels, these short stories are at a much lower than what might typically be seen in a 6th grade classroom. However, using a story that is easy to comprehend could be beneficial for the students since they are practicing a new strategy they have never tried before. After the teacher has read the story to the class, they should talk with the students and gently guide them to the major conflict of the story. Once that has been identified, pose the big question to the students, and then allow them to start answering it to the best of their abilities. In most cases with early discussions such as these, the teacher should play devil’s advocate for the discussion and pose opposing viewpoints for the students so that they are forced to further develop their own positions. The teacher should emphasize the use of text evidence, taking turns, and open minded thinking. When bringing the discussion to a close, explain to the students that this is the same sort of discussion that they will be using on a smaller scale while they are reading their book club novels.

Monitoring Book Club Discussions

Now that the students have a base level discussion to go from, they should all slowly work towards stronger, more developed arguments with continued practice. The teacher should walk around and monitor the students’ discourse and try to guide in certain directions as needed, but never take a firm stance in either direction, or get overly involved in the conversation. Each day after the students have finished a predetermined reading assignment, the first step they should complete as a group is to determine what the major issue of that day’s reading was. Frequently,

this could be the same issue for multiple days, which helps the students to dive deeper into the issue and have new, and frequently changed, feelings and opinions on the topic. Upon finishing the novel, the students should have one final CR discussion where they determine the main conflict of the story, and discuss how the character handled the issue (if resolved), or how the character should solve the issue (if unresolved).

CHAPTER III

INTEGRATING CR WITH LITERATURE STUDY: TEXT SELECTION

The following sections will seek to explore ways to integrate the Literature Study and Collaborative Reasoning frameworks through three novels that are commonly taught in U.S. 6th grade classrooms. It should be noted that because the reading for this strategy needs to be done in school, students should have books that are easily accessible to them and that can be read quickly. Therefore, all three of the texts chosen for this study are a somewhat lower reading level to ensure that students above, on, and slightly below level can all stay on track with their reading and comprehend the information effectively. Additionally, these novels have been chosen because of their ethical questions that allow for class discussions and their ability to be relatable to the age level. Each of these novels will be examined, major discussion points and questions identified, and extension activities for the novel and discussions will be provided. These extension activities seek to give the teacher a measurable, concrete assessment of student knowledge gained from instruction.

***Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Peterson**

Bridge to Terabithia, the 1978 Newbery Medal winner for most distinguished American children's book (Newbery Medal Winners, 1922-Present, 2015), is a shorter story with a powerful message. *Terabithia* is a lower level than 6th grade, rated at a 5.3 grade equivalent (Scholastic Book Wizard: *Bridge to Terabithia*, 2015), so it would be ideal for struggling readers in the classroom. This book, with its 810 lexile level, is in a perfect range for 6th grade readers who should typically fall between 665L and 1000L (Lexile-to-Grade Correspondence, 2015).

Beyond its appropriate reading level, *Bridge to Terabithia* is a compelling novel that draws in the reader with beautiful images of a fantasy world while simultaneously confronting real world issues. When introducing the novel to the students for the book talk, explain that it is the story of an unhappy 5th grade boy, Jess, who loves to run, and Leslie, the new girl who moves in down the street from him. When Leslie beats Jess in a race, they become quick friends and discover they have more in common than they original thought. Exploring the woods by their houses, they create “Terabithia”, a mystical land that helps them escape the troubles of their daily lives. However, the two cannot avoid the real world forever, and soon have to face the harsh realities of bullies, loss, and growing up too soon (Scholastic Book Wizard: Bridge to Terabithia, 2015).

Big Questions

There are multiple avenues that this book can explore in terms of conflict. Because this study suggests that the students do CR discussions throughout the novel, the questions should be parallel with what the students are reading at the time. These questions, and their derivatives, could be explored as the students move through the novel:

- *Should Leslie race with the boys, even if she knows she is going to be picked on and made fun of?*

This question is important at the very beginning of the story, where we see Leslie come into her new school and immediately begin making waves among her peers. She knows that she will be setting herself up to be picked on and not accepted by the others, and yet she insists on running anyway. The students should be able to determine if going and running was the best option for her (she meets Jess and they become friends), or if she should have stayed on the hill with the other girls (they pick on her, the boys stop running because they are always getting beaten).

- *Should Jess stand up against his father's wishes that he be more "manly"?*

Jessie's relationship with his father is strained from the very beginning. He is the only boy of all of his siblings and feels very much alone in the world. He takes solace in running and in art, but his father highly disapproves of his drawings. Students can explore the idea of the kinds of repercussions that could come from standing up to his father, and if they are worth the torment he must endure for his hobby.

- *Is it fair for Janice to be a bully to other students because of her circumstances?*

Janice, one antagonist in the story, terrorizes the other students at her school and is a constant concern for Jess and Leslie. However, some time through the story, they discover that Janice has a very troubled home life, which accounts for much of her acting out. Some students will take pity upon Janice, but others will feel as though she has no right to treat others badly, no matter what the circumstances. This question is one that is particularly relevant for the students, since school bullies are a common occurrence at the middle school age level.

- *Is it better to try to escape reality or face it head on?*

This question is the most central and overarching for the novel. It is one that can be visited multiple times throughout the students' reading, and will likely have varying responses depending upon where in the book they are. Creating Terabitha is a way for Jess and Leslie to escape their problems at school and at home, and they find safety and solace in their imaginary world. However, when Leslie dies, Jess is left to face many harsh realities all alone, and does not have the tools to cope.

Extension Activities

Because of this novel's wide variety of big questions, the ways that assessment activities could be explored are just as diverse. Outside research on bullying in schools and the motivation of adolescent girls to break gender norms would be beneficial to enhancing student discussions about this novel. That research could then be applied to the following activities done in class.

Class Text

As a class, the students could work together to write a text that explores dealing with grief and loss in our lives. Drawing from their own personal experiences, these reflective writings could be compiled anonymously and made into one larger text that explored learning to cope with the death of a loved one in an accessible and age appropriate way. This cathartic writing opens up avenues for students to explore the development of their positions in discussions about Jesse and how he copes with the loss of Leslie at the end of the novel.

Journal Entry

To explore the big questions surrounding Janice and her treatment of her peers, the students could write a journal entry from the perspective of the bully. Because of the information we are given about Janice's personal hardships, it would be beneficial for the students to try to see the perspective of the antagonist and give them fresh eyes for their discussions about her actions at school.

***Loser* by Jerry Spinelli**

A book talk for Jerry Spinelli's coming of age novel, *Loser*, shows students the life of a young boy, Donald Zinkoff, who does not realize just how "uncool" he is to his peers. Through his

journey from kindergarten up to fifth grade, Zinkoff goes through a variety of experiences with teachers and peers, some of which are positive, and some of which are not. He spends most of his elementary days unaware of how "uncool" he is to his peers, until his lack of athletic skill causes his team to lose at field day. In the end, Zinkoff does something incredible, and proves to his classmates, and maybe more importantly to himself, that anyone can be a hero (Scholastic Book Wizard: Loser, 2015). This book has a grade equivalent of 5.5 and a slightly lower lexile level of 650L. Along with its readability, *Loser* is equally as accessible to students through its familiar conflict of learning how to fit in with peers, figuring out who you are, and most importantly, being able to balance the two (Scholastic Book Wizard: Loser, 2015).

Big Questions

Through the interactions between Zinkoff and his peers and teachers, students should have many personal experiences to draw from for their CR discussions. Coping with bullies, angry teachers, and trying to make friends are all strong, relatable subjects for the 6th graders, and hopefully the students will use those experiences as a way to develop their positions on the following big questions.

- *Should Zinkoff work harder to be accepted by his peers?*

Students who are reading this novel should spend a large portion of the story deciding who is at fault for Zinkoff's problems in school. It could be argued that Zinkoff should maybe try to reach out, make more friends, and attempt to fit in at school, but he is so oblivious to his situation that he doesn't realize he sticks out at school. However, it is equally just as plausible that Zinkoff should take pride in who he is and continue to be true to his character, even if it is somewhat quirky, and wait for others to learn to accept him for who he is.

- *Should Zinkoff continue to partake in his extra-curricular activities even though he is not good at them?*

Zinkoff frequently joins teams and clubs and has a true enthusiasm for everything he does, including soccer and band. He has no particular skill in any of these areas, but he still enjoys participating regardless. Students who would like to argue against Zinkoff's participation, which seems cynical at first, could be reinforced by the fact that some of these activities are for teams, and by participating he is letting his teammates down, much like in the field day scene that occurs about half way through the book.

- *Is Zinkoff a successful child?*

Throughout the novel, Zinkoff shows an unrelenting drive to be himself. Although he is not good at any one thing in particular, he is a good person. Even at the end of the novel, when he risks his life to save Claudia, he is not successful in finding her but still manages to win over the hearts of those around him. Is that act of selflessness considered successful, even if he did not accomplish what he set out to do?

Extension Activities

The extension activities for this novel allow students to explore what it might feel like to spend time in Zinkoff's unusual shoes. Because many of the discussions that go with this novel ask the students to explore the treatment of someone different than themselves, the extension activities help the students to try to empathize with what a kid like Zinkoff might have to encounter in day to day life.

Persuasive Essay

Students could use the position they take during the conversation surrounding Zinkoff's success in the book to determine and defined their own definition of success. The students could use information not only from the text, but also from outside sources and statistics to justify their choices for what their version of success means. After completing this essay, students could revisit their discussion about Zinkoff and if he is successful with new material to draw from.

Reader's Theater-Style Role Play

Students could work in small group to create scripts that portray Zinkoff interacting with peers, adults, and coaches. These scripts could then be acted out as skits for the class, and students could give verbal feedback as to ways that they feel Zinkoff should or should not be treated. This activity could be graded based upon participation, feedback, and use of events from the text.

***Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor**

Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's Newbery Award winning novel *Shiloh* (Newbery Medal Winners, 1922-Present, 2015) pairs a precious, lovable beagle named Shiloh with some exceedingly difficult ethical questions to create an important story about right and wrong. At a grade equivalent of 5.7 (Scholastic Book Wizard: *Shiloh*, 2015), *Shiloh* should be accessible to 6th graders despite its colloquial West Virginian dialogue. In this book talk, explain to the students that the novel is centered around a boy named Marty who discovers a lost puppy while out hunting with his father. Marty soon realizes that this dog belongs to the sinister Judd Travers, who is abusing and neglecting the animal. Mary must make many tough decisions about whether or not he should try to save the dog, even if it means risking getting in trouble. This book allows

students to question their own sense of morality just as Marty does in regards to stealing food for the dog, hiding him from Judd, and keeping secrets from his family.

Big Questions

This novel is very much centered around one major question: when wrong can sometimes be considered right? However, this question will evolve as the story unfolds itself and Marty is faced with different dilemmas regarding the care of the dog.

- *Should Marty steal Shiloh from Judd?*

This question is what the entirety of the novel is centered around. However, there are many ways that the students will be able to explore this question, and it lends itself to other more real world applications if the students and/or teacher guides it in such a direction. Many times in life, we are asked to make the right decision in the face of opposition, but how far is it okay to go to do what you think is right? As Marty begins to omit information to his parents, steal food to feed to the dog, and hide the animal from his rightful owner, students can begin to question if Marty has gone too far.

- *Is it right for Marty to get involved in Judd's personal business?*

On the surface, this question seems simple, but with further inspection, a major question that is posed in this novel revolves around if one should mess in someone else's life, even if that someone is doing something wrong. Students could argue that Shiloh is wholly Judd's property, and although it is undoubtedly wrong how Judd treats him, he does not have the right to get involved in his personal affairs.

- *Does Judd become a “good guy” in the end?*

After the students have finished reading the novel, they can speculate as to whether or not Judd’s act of kindness at the end of the story is indicative of a change in the character himself. Students can use previous examples from the story and search for clues that might point to a softening of the evil Judd Travers that eventually leads to him changing his mind and giving Marty the dog.

Extension Activities

Extension activities for this novel encompass a study of outside information about animal abuse and ways to stop it. This information, although sometimes sensitive in nature, can be located by the students online with safe search filters, as well as gearing their searches towards the appropriate age level. With this added outside information, the students are able to enhance their own knowledge and bring an added layer of facts into their discussion.

Book Jacket Cover

In this activity, the students will be asked to create a new cover for the book. This cover can have multiple parts to it, so as to give a well-rounded overview of the novel itself, as well as the big questions that accompany it. The students could create a new cover art, depicting whatever they feel is the most important moment from the novel. Then, one inside cover could give a list of facts and statistics about animal abuse and a few sentences on ways that students feel it could be combatted. The inside cover and back could include a summary, a book review, or an author study, per what the teacher feels is conducive for their classroom.

Wanted Posters

Students will create wanted posters for this activity that will allow them to explore different avenues of what is considered right and wrong. After discussing who is the “bad guy” in the story, students will have the opportunity to play a devil’s advocate and decide if they want to put Marty or Judd on the poster for crimes that they committed in the novel. This activity helps students to see both sides to the story and better understand Marty’s moral confusion as he works through the plot of the story.

CHAPTER IV

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

Because this research is purely theoretical, the first initial step would be to take this framework and implement it into a 6th grade U.S. classroom. Another aspect of further analyzing this research would be taking this framework to the teachers and survey if they felt like it would be something that could integrate into their classrooms with ease. Expansions for the framework itself would include integrating more technology, as well as developing a model that will allow students to research outside, real world information to bring into the discussions for the older age groups.

Taking the Framework Online

Because teachers today are constantly looking to integrate new technologies (Kay 2010), it would be interesting to take the CR style discussions online through blogs and other social media. Hypothetically, the teacher could pose a big question online, and the students could post their arguments in the form of a discussion post, where others could respond back and forth. This sort of feedback would allow students to think more before they gave their opinions since they are being written, but would likely slow the progress of the conversation. Some literature studies have already made the switch to this online style of discussing novels (Bromley et al, 2014), but further research could be done on how CR style discussions fare in an online format.

Outside Research

Although some of the extension activities seek to integrate outside information, it would be beneficial for students at this particular age group to be able to conduct online research that surrounds some of the big questions from these novels. Then, the students could have further evidence and proof to further their positions in the discussion. Additionally, the students would get valuable practice in determining the validity of Internet sites, finding information independently, and integrating it into their own knowledge and opinions.

In Conclusion

By combining these frameworks, the hope is that both individual strategies are strengthened. In today's classrooms, teachers are stretched very thin by the constant and ever-growing demands on their instructional time (Kay 2010). The models that are being used in the classroom must be as efficient as possible; both by teaching many different skills concurrently, as well as being thorough in the teaching so that students can retain both the information and skills. This study seeks to develop such a model, one that will take a strategy used for decades (literature study) and one that is new to the field (collaborative reasoning), and make them both work together in such a way that is more beneficial than their individual implementation might be. Another major goal for this study is to present the information in such a way that teachers feel they can understand and implement this study into their classroom with ease. Through the step-by-step model, and the application of the framework to commonly used novels, teachers should be able to introduce this hybrid strategy and carry it out in their own classroom with little difficulty. Due to its step by step implementation plan, real world application, and proposed mutually beneficial results for students in the classroom, this combination of literature studies and collaborative

reasoning has potential to make the lives of teachers a little easier and the growth of students in their classrooms a little larger.

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